

often untrue, and yet we read them for the  
 pure pleasure  
 they still give? Even as criticism, the wildest  
 judgements  
 of Pepys on Shakespeare are worth volumes  
 of modern  
 verbiage, because they are so genuine and  
 true for Pepys,  
 if now for no one else. So with Fontenelle,  
 when he  
 dismisses Aeschylus as 'une espece de fou'; so  
 with Johnson  
 on *Lycidas*. We shake our heads, but we read  
 on. For  
 Fontenelle and Johnson have more force  
 and charm,  
 more style than fifty 'corrected critics put  
 together; and  
 it is style that matters ultimately in criticism,  
 as in any  
 other form of literature. The wiseacres who  
 write so  
 hideously of the Beautiful, have their vogue  
 and pass;  
 while a Sainte-Beuve, too subtle to get  
 enmeshed in  
 any system, too sceptical to call his work by  
 any more  
 pretentious name than *Causeries du Lundi*,  
 lives on above  
 their dust. Those weekly 'talks' of his will  
 soon have  
 lasted out their century. Yet he had, in the  
 end, no prin-  
 ciples, no formulas left at all: 'II craindrait'  
 (said Taine of  
 him) \*de froisser la verit  en Tenfermant  
 dans des for-  
 mules'; he used none of that jargon dear to  
 mediocrities,  
 who will not recognise that subtle thinking  
 does not entail  
 complicated language. Not imagining himself  
 a scientist,  
 he did not conceive himself licensee! to be a  
 barbarian  
 or a bore; not thinking of literature as a sort  
 of religion,  
 he did not talk of it in tones borrowed from  
 the sacristy.

There are critics who could be taken more seriously, if they took themselves and their subject less so. No one will accuse Boileau of undervaluing his art; yet it was he who once humorously remarked: 11 faut avouer que j'ai deux grands talents, Tun de jouer aux quilles, Fautre de bien faire des vers.'

Is it then claiming too little for criticism, or asking too much of it, to suggest that those who practise it should cultivate enough good sense and good taste to regard